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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Madre, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-65912 (E) 040215

Please recycle

Statement

As all Iraqi citizens face daily insecurity due to terrorism and civil strife, women and girls experience additional, targeted abuse because of their gender. The impact of the crisis in Iraq on women and girls has been grave under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as well as when fleeing from violence to central and southern Iraq. Since the takeover of several major cities in Iraq in June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant has imposed its fundamentalist agenda directly on the bodies of women.

Within days, credible reports began emerging of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's fighters abducting and raping women in the territories they control. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant militants have committed grave human rights violations, including execution, severing hands, rape, sexual slavery, and flogging. Fatwas have been issued calling for sexual slavery in the form of "gifting" women for the new Caliphate fighters, under the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant decree imposing "Jihad Al Nikah" or sexual jihad.

If the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant succeeds, a large part of Iraqi society would be ruled by a brutal Islamic state that uses murder, torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, against those it deems as not adhering to a narrow religious extremism. As men have heeded calls to fight, women have become the heads of hundreds of thousands of households. Women and children in their care are also the majority of the near two million people who have fled their homes in fear of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and airstrikes.

As gender-based violence escalates in the growing sectarian conflict, it is critical to expand safety mechanisms for women and girls by establishing and maintaining safe housing, and promoting women's rights to physical security. Linking this imperative to the creation of lasting positive change requires strengthening the capacity of progressive Iraqi citizens and organizations committed to ending Gender-Based Violence and addressing pre-existing threats to women and girls, embedded in Iraq's law and social norms.

In Iraq today, women and girls contend with myriad forms of discrimination and Gender-Based Violence. Despite numerous provisions under Iraqi law that aim to protect women's human rights, violence against women remains egregious and widespread. Weak rule of law and judicial process, in combination with social tolerance, have fostered the growth of organized crime, impunity for gender-based and domestic violence, trafficking, rape, and a resurgence of harmful traditional practices based on tribal and religious law as well as exclusion from the public sphere and the denial of equitable access to legal protections and public services.

Gender-Based Violence and discrimination

Reports from the region indicate that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant militia have gone door to door, forcing their way into homes, killing men and male children and abducting women and girls in Mosul and Tel Afar. Once detained, women must convert to the extremist interpretation of Islam. They are then sold to Islamist fighters in an open market held in former bazaars, a school and a cinema building. Prices range from $100 to $1,000 USD. If women refuse to convert, the punishment is daily rape — in some instances by dozens of men over the course of only a few hours — and a slow death.

Rape and sexual assault, while criminalized in the penal code, continue to be met with apathy hence impunity prevails. The Criminal Code states that perpetrators of crimes involving sexual violence may be exonerated if they marry their victim. In cases where rape results in the death of the victim, the Penal Code does permit a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, though this is rarely enforced.

Therefore, overt and pervasive discrimination in the legal and criminal justice system as well as widespread Gender-Based Violence in form of rape, domestic violence, and trafficking exclude women and girls from the public sphere forcing them to forfeit their rights to education, employment, legal and other public services.

Honour killings

Norms of "family honour" recognized in Iraq's penal code, which permits honour considerations to mitigate sentences, are a grave threat to women and girls who have been detained or abused by fighters. Some Iraqis have called on their Government to bomb the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-controlled makeshift prisons where women are being held, sold and raped, in order to erase the perceived affront to the honour of those communities. Honour killings are committed against women in Iraq by family or community members as a way to restore collective honour and are often arranged to appear as suicides. In addition, women fleeing from attempted honour killings, domestic violence, trafficking, forced prostitution or forced marriage cannot obtain legal identification without verification from a male family member. Without such identification documents, women cannot travel, find housing, obtain employment, access health services, or enrol in education institutions. In such cases, women become stateless and are left more vulnerable to violence and discrimination. According to reports on the ground, thousands of stateless women reside in every major city in Iraq.

Forced, under-aged, and temporary marriages

Severe gender discrimination in Iraq's personal status law also further erodes women's rights in the current climate. As militias mobilize throughout the country, hundreds of thousands of households have lost male breadwinners. Ensuing financial desperation has induced a rise in forced, temporary and under-aged marriages. Temporary marriages, previously rare, have re-emerged under the growing influence of certain religious leaders. In this controversial practice, women and girls are "married" in the presence of a religious figure for a fixed period of time, which can be as short as several hours. Such marriages are, in fact, a form of religiously sanctioned prostitution, with payment defined as a "dowry" to the woman or her family. However temporary marriage does not protect women from honour killings if the relationship is disclosed; neither does the man acknowledge his children who are born in such a union. Forced marriages, also on the rise, have led to a spike in suicides, especially by self-immolation, as young women protest non-consensual marriage arrangements.

The pending Ja'afari draft law, proposed prior to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's incursion, threatens a number of women's human rights. It includes provisions that would lower the marrying age for girls to nine years old and legalize marital rape by entitling a husband to non-consensual sex with his wife. The draft law would also prevent women from leaving the house without permission from

their husband, automatically grant custody for children over two years old to the father in divorce cases, and significantly limit women's rights in matters of inheritance. Justice Minister Hassan al-Shmmari introduced the draft law to the Council of Ministers on October 27, 2013. It remains pending despite strong opposition from Iraqi civil society, including some religious leaders.

In the absence of Government sponsored services and legal remedies to address gender-based violence, local Iraqi women's Non-Governmental Organizations are at the forefront of providing necessary services. Even before the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's invasion, Iraqi Non-Governmental Organizations and women's rights defenders seeking to assist women and girls encountered regular harassment, arbitrary surveillance, and warrantless searches. Many human rights organizations are forced to operate illegally and clandestinely, especially those who shelter women fleeing violence, which remains illegal for Non-Governmental Organizations in central and southern Iraq.

Recommendations

In order to address violence and discrimination against Iraqi women and girls, the government of Iraq and Donor States must prioritize the following:

Amend the shelter law to allow Non-Governmental Organizations to run private shelters for displaced families and individuals. Local Iraqi women's organizations are mobilizing an emergency response to protect people at severe risk as the threat of sectarian violence grows. They are in the best position to reach displaced families and to provide shelter and aid and their efforts must be supported.

Withdraw the pending Ja'afari law that would legalize marriage for girls, aged nine years and older, sanction marital rape and limit women's rights in custody, divorce and inheritance.

Amend the honour crimes law to equate killings motivated by "honour" with all murder under law, in compliance with international law.

Establish a mechanism for displaced women and girls to obtain identification documents without the need for verification from a family member in order to facilitate their access to housing, health services, employment and education.

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Statement submitted by MAMTA: Health Institute for Mother and Child, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

MAMTA: Health Institute for Mother and Child is committed to the advancement of women and through its work with individuals, communities, and governments it endeavours to reduce obstacles to woman's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. The organization's work 'With and For Women' effectively applies the broad framework of human development with its four pillars as Expansion of Human Capabilities; Widening of Choices; Enhancement of Freedom and Fulfillment of Human Rights. We believe in women's potential as drivers of sustainable development and appreciate global efforts to promote participation of women and their empowerment in terms of education, employment and the environment as a major step in achieving poverty eradication and social integration, which should pave the way for decent work for all. We continuously strive towards reducing the barriers through supporting reforms of institutions to ensure competence and capacity for gender mainstreaming at all levels of governance while strengthening community actions for equitable gender norms nationally and in the South Asia Region.

MAMTA: Health Institute for Mother and Child itself is an equal opportunity employer; promotes women participation at the highest level and endeavours to create a safe and equitable work environment for women with training opportunities to advance their career path.

Betterment of health and development of adolescent girls and women with a focus on realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights is integral to our work. We believe sexual and reproductive rights are indivisible, inalienable, interrelated human rights that are fundamental to achieving gender equality and human development.

The organization recognizes that violence against women throughout their lives derives from patriarchy and harmful cultural practices. These may include certain traditional or customary practices and acts of extremism, in addition to their gender, to women's race, language, caste, religion, workplace, community and society. We therefore emphasize the need to prevent vulnerability, discrimination, violence and marginalization based on gender, age, race, caste, class, lineage, marital status, sexual orientation and identity, livelihood, migrant status, HIV status, disability, etc., aiming to remove discriminatory laws, policies and programmes and addressing social and economic barriers. We support integration of efforts on addressing violence against women to the extent possible, to improve its effectiveness in terms of reach and desired outcome.

MAMTA: Health Institute for Mother and Child, largely pursue the route of gender transformation with an ecological approach to address inequitable gender norms and power dynamics at the levels of family, community and service delivery that undermines women's access to opportunities of growth and health care. We will continue to empower girls and women, strengthen community support and quality delivery of essential services that includes education and health to affect the targeted health and development outcomes. MAMTA: Health Institute for Mother and Child is a strong advocate and will be persistent in its efforts for ending harmful traditional practices like 'Child Marriage', an extreme form of child rights violation that not only limits opportunities for girls to realize their full potential but deprives most of them from basic human rights to health and well-being.

Our commitment towards The United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995 is reflected through our continuing work and commitments for the future under the categories given below:

Education and Training of Women: Non-discrimination in access to education and training lays the foundation of equal relationships between men and women. We recognize that increased years of schooling of girls has a positive impact on delaying age at marriage, first conception and also reduces vulnerabilities, risks and experiences of physical and sexual violence especially by spouse and family members. The school drop-out rate among girls is higher in comparison to boys especially among the rural and socio-economically marginalized populations in this part of the world. The opportunities and choices for meaningful engagement like vocational training within schools or out of schools are scarce.

We reaffirm our commitment towards addressing all such discrimination to fulfil compulsory education for all girls with special focus to include girls in socio-economically marginalized families. Our work with young girls and boys and their parents will continue to emphasize the importance of completion of education and acquiring vocational/livelihood skills while we continue to advocate with government and other agencies to make opportunities and resources available. Also, critical to this effort will be to demystify stereotypical roles of women that act as barriers in exercising choices in learning and earning opportunities while multiplying efforts to enhance self-esteem enabling them to realize their full potential.

Women and Health: Women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and this right must be secured throughout the whole life cycle in equality with men. We recognize prevalent problems that pose serious threats to women's health and well-being like lack of water (especially potable water) and sanitation facilities; disproportionate distribution of food and resources affecting girls and women in resource deficit households; son preference leading to discrimination affecting the nutrition and access to health care of the girl child; lack of programmes to reach out to adolescent girls on nutrition and sexual and reproductive health while many continue to live in conditions that forces child and early marriages, child bearing; increases vulnerabilities to physical and sexual violence and above all unequal access to health care services. We also share concerns on rising incidences of accidents and injuries (especially those caused by violence and neglect) to women of all ages.

We will continue our work with communities and informing policies and programmes to address these problems for all women to attain good physical and mental health to live a productive and fulfilling life. We will constantly promote women to have control on all aspects of their health, in particular their own sexuality and fertility; basic to their empowerment as stated in The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China — September 1995, Action for Equality, Development and Peace.

Women and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Reproductive health eludes many of the people in this region due to inadequate levels of knowledge on human sexuality and inappropriate or poor quality reproductive health information and services; high risk sexual behaviour, discriminatory norms and practices, negative attitude towards women and girls and limited power over their own sexual and reproductive health especially adolescent girls. We are committed to advance

efforts for multiplying experiences of safe motherhood among women and girls. We strongly believe for all women, especially those young and vulnerable, to have equitable access to information, education and services in a friendly manner (with respect, privacy and confidentiality) to deal with their sexuality in a positive and responsible way protects and promotes their sexual and reproductive health. Critical to it is to empower women and girls to be responsive to the needs of their own sexuality and reproduction; garner skills to negotiate and assert for ones' safety and access education and services to lead a satisfying and safe sex life.

We recommend and reaffirm our commitment for all especially women and girls to receive comprehensive sexuality education either in formal or in informal settings and to the need to promote mutually respectful gender relations to reduce vulnerabilities and risks to health and well-being of women and girls and mitigate its impact on her health, economic and social status.

The Girl Child: Girl child is discriminated against, from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. MAMTA: Health Institute for Mother and Child strictly stands by 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child' and reaffirms its commitment towards ending discrimination and neglect towards girl child and all harmful traditional practices like child marriage through its work to sensitize and educate parents, key community stakeholders, teachers, health service providers, law enforcement agencies and policy and programme makers for strong community actions, watchful service delivery and effective legislations, policies and programmes. We will continue our work to empower girls with transformative approaches that includes work with boys as well towards enhancing self-esteem of girls.

Our work will specifically reaffirm and promote equal access to education, vocational learning and livelihood opportunities; health care, shared responsibilities and informed decision making while empowering girls to be responsive to the needs of her sexuality and reproduction.

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Statement submitted by Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

The status of women in the world today shows evidence of progress made in gender equality since the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and subsequent reviews Plus Ten (2005) and Fifteen (2010). However, poverty, violence against women and girls, including human trafficking and lack of or inadequate educational opportunities prevent millions from enjoying the quality of life everyone deserves.

There is reluctance in countries around the world to make the education of women a primary goal in developmental plans. In many countries approaches to women's advancement are hindered by traditional social and cultural norms and gender concerns are left out of national economic development plans. Women are excluded from decision-making structures in many communities and lack sufficient representation in national parliaments. Hence national and regional development plans do not address the structural causes of poverty that keep women in oppressive and subservient roles.

In many countries in Africa, Latin America and other regions, women are the main agricultural workers. They are responsible for preparation of fields, carrying water, planting and caring for crops, often using only a hoe. The men may help in the harvesting process. Thus, although women have a major role in all agricultural work, they are not present at the meetings where agricultural decisions and plans are being made on national and local levels. Poverty affects the entire household yet the gender division in labour and in the responsibilities for the family's welfare places a disproportionate burden on women and girls. In many developing countries the welfare system does not provide for women who are living in poverty. When a woman has children and must take care of them alone she finds herself in a very precarious position. The risk of falling into abject poverty is greater for women than for men. Older women are sometimes abandoned and are unable to support themselves.

The lower position of women in society makes them targets for exploitation as seen in the large number of women who are forced into prostitution or who are trapped into roles as sex workers against their wishes. This vulnerability is seen in many of the nations where women are not valued as equal citizens. The scourge of human trafficking, modern day slavery, thrives when extreme poverty is the fate of a majority of citizens. Women and girls, as well as men and boys, who lack education and employment opportunities, are easy prey for the criminal enterprises that profit at their expense.

Women's empowerment is key to resolving many of the underlying social and economic development problems, such as violence against women and girls, poverty and hunger reduction, gender parity in elementary and secondary education and environmental sustainability. Lack of legal protections for people's human rights and entitlements to decent livelihood, safety, health and education are major barriers to empowerment.

The United Nations plays a major role in calling Member States to fulfil their obligations as signatories to the Declaration of Human Rights, promotion of social and economic development goals, protection of Earth and its natural resources. Since its existence there have been positive advancements in all of these areas and statements calling for significant changes abound. Yet, conditions today for the majority of the world's poor and in a special way that of women who live in abject

poverty and lack even the basic necessities of a decent life such as, food, housing, basic education, healthcare and opportunity for employment that provides a living wage cry out for justice and equality.

The 57th Commission on the Status of Women in 2013 was the largest international meeting on ending violence against women and called for action. It noted, among other things that up to 70 per cent of women in some countries face physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Millions of women and girls are trafficked in modern-day slavery and rape is a tactic of war. Michele Bachelet, United Nations Women Executive Director in her opening address cited five key areas for action.

Strengthen implementation of laws, policies and programmes for preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.

Place more focus on preventing violence against women and girls.

Address prevention and response together as part of a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to be effective.

Establish comprehensive and accessible multi-sectoral services and responses.

Reliable data, analysis and research are essential to inform the development of laws, policies and programmes on violence against women and girls.

We Maryknoll Sisters promote empowerment of women through elementary and secondary education of girls and leadership training for women in countries where we work in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Victims of sexual abuse and trafficking are provided social services needed to overcome physical and emotional trauma and education and training required to earn a living.

We affirm the 2013 Civil Society Declaration, 5 February 2013 at the Fifty-first Session of the Commission for Sustainable Development. It states: "In a globalized world driven by financial engines, one can sometimes lose sight of the people and the planet that are to be assisted and protected. When wealth and power are sought as ends in themselves there is a danger that ... the common good is reduced to fit the outcomes achievable by private and for profit firms ...

"For some, the only way to achieve development is through the market. This has tended to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few ... It has been noted 'Economic Activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic. This needs to be directed towards the pursuit of the common good, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine of wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution.'" Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 36.

The Commission for Social Development, 52nd Session, 11-24 February, 2014 in preparing a post-2015 agenda for sustainable development reviewed the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals. In terms of empowerment of women, results have been mixed. Whether or not having separate Millennium Development Goals raised unrealistic expectations as to potential improvements in the lives of the most impoverished women is unclear. On the one hand a dedicated goal on gender is a powerful symbol of a commitment to "mainstreaming" gender.

On the other hand it fails to acknowledge that gender is a cross-cutting issue which needs to be part of all discussions on human development.

Maryknoll Sisters are committed to supporting the work of the 59th Commission on the Status of Women in its ongoing efforts to eliminate poverty and hunger in the world, especially among the poorest and most marginalized, the majority of whom are women and children.

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Statement submitted by Misión Mujer, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Statement

Empowering young adolescents and their engagement on the post-2015 agenda

"More than ever before, the essential task of education seems to be to make sure that all people enjoy the freedom of thought, judgment, feeling and imagination to develop their talents and keep control of their lives as much as they can." Jaques Delors

The 59th Session on the Status of Women will conduct an overview of the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action, in order to examine how we, as international communities, have reached or failed in accomplishing them.

Gender equality was stated as its main goal, ending with all types of discrimination against women. There were many ways mentioned to reduce such discrimination: reducing poverty, offering better opportunities for education, improving health services, reducing gender violence, promoting their humans rights, recognizing their right to work, to participate in the global economy and politics, among others.

Education should be considered one of the main aspects to be evaluated. Looking forward on the post-2015 agenda, 50 per cent of the world's population is youth and 51 per cent of it are young adolescent girls, meaning they are our core population. At the World Youth Conference celebrated this past May, the President of Sri Lanka welcomed the youth "to be part of a process that will ensure young people at the heart of decision making; to be part of a revolution towards making this the Golden Era for Youth Development", calling them drivers of change.

Education, recognized as a human right, is essential for the development of human capital, and more specifically, for the future of young generations. Education, as the most important tool for the development of any country, must be universal, equal, and of high standard. It is only through this manner that the quality of life, the access to job opportunities and the social environment may be improved. All of this in order to achieve the eradication of poverty and most of the major problems that concern the world today: violence, drug abuse, environmental damage, social and economic inequalities, HIV/AIDS, among other diseases; early pregnancies. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

It is well known that youth is the major human resource for development and they represent key agents for social chance, economic development and technological innovation; nevertheless, they are nowadays going through specific situations that diminish their possibilities of growth such as: the economic crisis; the increasing numbers of violent acts and harsh content in the media; high levels of unemployment; changes in the role of the family as a vehicle for shared responsibility and socialization of youth; inadequate opportunities for vocational education, and lack of quality education. Only through education can opportunities open for boys and girls, teenagers and young adults to have a better comprehension of the world in which they live.

Focusing specifically on young women, offering good educational opportunities can make a real change not just in developing a profession, but also in order to make thoughtful decisions in their lives, their families, their countries. If we are truly engaged in fighting against gender discrimination we have to start by offering the adolescent girls the opportunity to create themselves, not to tell them what should be the best for their lives, which cause to fight for, or how they should think about the world, their future or how they should run their lives and their families.

They will still need food supply, better access to health care, reduce risk of diseases, violence. But if we try just to solve all of these problems without educating or with a superficial education, our job would be partial, because they will never be able to be independent from us, adults, and from man. They will always have to expect and wait for the solutions to come from the outside. This dependence is their condemnation.

Several efforts have been made to improve education globally: for instance, "Education for All" was the motto of the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, April 2000), where it was stressed that the right to education is not just the access to it, but an education to life which should also include the teaching of relational skills and abilities that enable young people to assume control of their lives, in the social context and contemporary world.

Regarding other aspects, the terminal efficiency in basic education puts into notice that while the improvement in the coverage has mostly been achieved, the same cannot be said about the quality and permanency. As an example of this, more than half of young people between 15 and 18 years old are out of school in Mexico. This means that from 98 per cent of boys and girls that finish elementary school and begin middle school, only 62 per cent will see their education finished. As a result of this, there are millions of teenagers without an education, drastically reducing their opportunities, and raising the psychosocial risks that will affect them and their environment. Male and female teenagers leave the classroom to go to work and balance their family's economy, throwing aside the option of a better future that would come about with the finishing of their studies. The Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean sustains that at least 11 to 12 years of formal education is required in order to avoid poverty and all social ills associated with it.

Another problem is that the indicators established for the evaluation measure quantitative amounts: number of students per country, number of permanence, average age, etc. but not qualitative results. The students are at school, but they have no light in classrooms, have not eaten breakfast, might have climate adversity, or can be too many for one professor, etc. So they might be sitting on a chair, hearing a professor but this does not say anything about real education, an impact on their lives. So we recommend that a scientific evaluation be established to measure the impact of the results shown on the different Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action, so we can have a much more accurate notion of reality.

Empowering adolescent women will make us reach our goals: We have a recent example on Malala Yousafzai and she clearly resumes these ideas on her farewell speech to the United Nations General assembly "Dear brothers and sisters, we want schools and education for every child's bright future. We will continue our journey to our destination of peace and education. No one can stop us. We will

speak up for our rights and we will bring change to our voice. We believe in the power and the strength of our words. Our words can change the whole world because we are all together, united for the cause of education. And if we want to achieve our goal, then let us empower ourselves with the weapon of knowledge and let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness."

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Statement

The gender mainstreaming approach to enhance effective women's empowerment through poverty eradication and modern education

The five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action asked that over 153 Member States report on their actions to implement the Platform from 12 critical areas of concern. In effect, the review of such national reports indicated that profound changes on the status and role of women have occurred in the years since the start of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1976. More specifically, it acknowledged that women have increasingly and consistently entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, thus, elevating and propagating their potential and ability to participate in economic decision making at various levels. As such, the women have individually and collectively become major actors in the rise of civil society throughout the world. They have used roles of non-governmental organizations, especially women's organizations, in putting the concerns of women and gender equality on national and international agendas, now being adopted by governments.

However, despite the progress, Member States showed that much work was still needed with regard to the implementation of the Platform for Action in particularly two major areas that have continuously and incessantly hampered major efforts to gender equality worldwide: gender violence and poverty. As well, it is also acknowledged that globalization has introduced other challenges such as trafficking in women and girls, changing nature of armed conflict, growing gap between nations and genders, and the detachment of macroeconomic policy from social protection concerns. In reflection to these challenges, analytical assessments of the national reports on the implementation of the Platform have been critical as there has been no major breakthrough with regard to equal sharing of decision making in political structures at local, national and international levels. In most countries of the world, despite several decades of intensive gender equality and women empowerment measures implemented, the representation of women remains low.

What could have imposed the delay or derailing challenges on such an inclusive Platform?

High Level Policy Gabs with Field Pragmatism. The approach of the Platform for Action embraces the dynamics of equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as, the corresponding derivative international human rights instruments, in particular, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Declaration on the Right to Development. The legal status quo of these documents provide the high level policy force to instruct high level national bodies to adhere to the standards. But are these standards meant only for high level battles? The local community and target beneficiary women remain ignorant of such texts which are only limitedly propagated amongst the governors or leaders who detain and have been maintaining such discriminatory powers in detriment to the status of local women. The local community girls, from childhood, grow in ignorance and cultivate the intrinsic gender inferiority postures such that, at maturity, they find it difficult to automate the acceptance of their newly recognized status in gender equality.

Gender Equity, Poverty and Violence against Women. The Platform for Action makes inclusive reflections for the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development, framed in the context of poverty eradication based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice. Yet, it fails to distinguish gender roles within the gender equity framework that should guide proper understanding and measure needs and differences between women and men in terms of socioeconomic responsibilities. As well, through its Strategic objectives D.1, D.2, and D.3, the Platform highlights the high level policy need to prevention, study of causes and consequences and, the elimination of violence against women. In the same perspective, the Platform further outlines the contours of discriminatory aspects against the girl child inclusively within negative cultural attitudes and practices, biases in education, health, economic exploitation and awareness and participation in social, economic and political life. As a priority orientation, though the Platform mentions the need to strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child, it fails to lay the gender equity emphasis upon such family roles which today, because the majority of homes lack such an understanding, violence against women has remained a persistent setback.

Gender Equity, Cultural Relativism and Modern Education. In presenting the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and not emphasizing the gender equity perspective of such rights, the Platform limits its implication within the cultural relativity context in the scope of cultural women's status. While as cultural women or girls, traditional societal values demand that they play subordinate roles amongst their men, modern education require that such cultural values be adjusted in order to suite the context of equality. The controversial battle between both positions is that they are both, at the same time, deemed correct and necessitate protection. As such, adjusting one's culture to suite a rights based norm which, at the same time, may be violating another norm within the same set of rules and principles, (reflected through articles 3, 12, and 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) is very confusing to those directly concerned. Also, understood that modern education comes in with consistently improving information technology and communication, the Platform (through strategic objectives F3 and J1) does well in mentioning and addressing the need for increased participation and access to women in all such modern markets. However, the cultural relativist overview within this is silent, thus, a lapse in the gender equity dimension for such Modern Educational standards. Deeply entrenched customary or traditional rules and habits have influenced a degree acceptance by women and girls in respect to the dominant and take-charge position of their men over certain community preoccupations generally regarded and accepted as the duty of the man. Therefore, while global governance is rapidly engendering advanced Information Communication and Technology, such traditional communities lag behind in beliefs that it is a man's only issue. (E/CN.6/2014/NGO/174).

Scoping the review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, during the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and in reflection of the outlined challenges, it is worth acknowledging the following considerations:

- The high level policy gab between governing authorities and the target beneficiaries need to be lessened through obvious pragmatic and responsive measures. Meaning, communication of high level policy texts need effective interpretative and propagation opportunities to their remote beneficiary targets such that, they are truly empowered on the rights contents of the texts for their well-being, as well as knowing right channels for immediate and effective legal recourse and remedies.

- Rudimentary analysis for gender equity dimensions in defining the socioeconomic responsibilities between men and women also needs acute thoughts. Implying, the mentality of the cultural man needs scrutiny adjustment to come to terms with the fact that, his role and responsibility for home provisions over his family is a privileged gender equity consideration which should not in anyway, be taken as a requisite for dominance within the society. As well, the man would be made to understand several other gender equity reasons that apportion other sociocultural responsibilities for the woman, thus, granting the status of equality and mutual support which is not mistaken for the type of favours that demand appreciative returns in subordination.

- Cultural relativism within the modern educational spectrum should henceforth develop perquisites that engage more of traditional men's will and gender equity guides in the gender mainstreaming quest for gender equality.

Precisely, all gender mainstreaming activities to enhance gender equality need rudimentary analysis of the involved gender equity specifics such that all target parties are able to make clear ethical distinctions of their human rights and dignified privileges against those of others.

Though we all share equal rights and freedoms, the framework of gender equity makes gender mainstreaming closest to the attainment of gender equality goals for women empowerment and poverty eradication.

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Statement submitted by Nation Builders Organisation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Status of women

Various communities and nations have had women relegated to the back far too long. Though a tangible development has been made in different communities and at various levels of leadership, the obvious still remains that there is a long way to go in our race for gender equality.

In India, the status of women has undergone a phenomenal change from what it used to be to what we have now, from a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights in recent decades. In the ancient times, the primary duty of women was service to one's husband. Scholars, however, believe that in ancient India, women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life.

Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rigvedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. Gargi and Maitreyi were notable women sages mentioned in scriptures such as Rig Veda and Upanishads.

The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practised. In some parts of India, the Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas.

In spite of these conditions, there were exceptions as some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. Prominent among them are Razia Sultana, Chand Bibi, Mirabai, Akka Mahadevi, Rami Janabai and Lai Ded. Some Bhakti sects and Guru Nanak preached the message of equality between men and women.

During the British Raj, many reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule etc. fought for the upliftment of women. Raja Rammohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of the Sati practice in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for the improvement in condition of widows led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai also helped the cause of women upliftment.

Rani Lakshmi Bai and Begum Hazrat Mahal, were notable women who led the revolt of 1857. Women also played an important part in India's independence struggle. Some of the famous freedom fighters include Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Annie Besant, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Durgabai Deshmukh. Chandramukhi Basu, Kadambini Ganguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi were few of the earliest Indian women to obtain educational degrees.

In modern India, traditions such as sati, jauhar, and devadasi have been banned and are largely defunct. However, the purdah is still practiced by many Indian women, and child marriage remains prevalent despite it being an illegal practice under current Indian laws. Women now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), and equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42).

The feminist activism in India picked up momentum during the 1970s, which forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduce the category of custodial rape. Female activists united over issues such as female infanticide, gender bias, women's health, and female literacy. Many women's groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and other states.

In the 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented Non-Governmental Organizations. Self-help groups and Non-Governmental Organizations such as Self Employed Women's Association have played a major role in women's rights. Many women including Medha Patkar (Narmada Bachao Andolan) have emerged as leaders of local movements. The most prominent Indian women are Indira Gandhi, Pratibha Patil and Meira Kumar the trio hold the distinction of being the Prime Minister, President and Speaker of the Lok Sabha respectively.

The steady change in the position of women can be highlighted by looking at what has been achieved by women in the country since Independence. In 1951, Prem Mathur became the first Indian woman commercial pilot of the Deccan Airways. In 1959, Anna Chandy became the first Indian woman judge of a Kerala High Court. In 1972, Kiran Bedi became the first female recruit to join the Indian Police Service.

In 1984, Bachendri Pal became the first Indian woman to climb Mount Everest. In 1989, Justice M. Fathima Beevi became the first woman judge of the Supreme Court of India. In 1993, Priya Jhingan became the first woman to be commissioned into the Indian Army. In 1994, Harita Kaur Deol became the first Indian woman pilot in the Indian Air Force, on a solo flight. In 2000, Karnam Malleswari became the first Indian woman to win an Olympic medal.

The year 2001 is seen as a landmark as it was declared the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti) by the Government of India. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was also passed the same year. Two states, Kerala and Mizoram, have attained universal female literacy rates. In urban India, girls are nearly at par with the boys in terms of education.

In regards to workforce participation, contrary to the common perception, a large per cent of women in India work. In urban India, women have impressive numbers in the workforce and are at par with their male counterparts in terms of wages and position in the workplace. In fact, 30 per cent of the software industry workforce is female. In rural India, agriculture and allied industrial sectors employ almost 90 per cent of the total female labour.

In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at around 60 per cent of the total labour. Women account for more than 90 per cent of

total employment in dairy production in India. They also constitute 50 per cent of the total employed in forest-based small-scale enterprises. (VINEET PRAKASH)

Though we have wedged a good war on the status of women, there is still more to do, let's not relent, we've got this. The world needs more strong women,

Great heart, true faith and ready hands,

Women who the lust of office cannot kill,

Women who the spoils of office cannot buy,

Women who protect opinions and a will,

Women who have honour, women who would not lie,

Women who can stand before a demagogue and

Dame his treats flatteries without winking.

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Statement submitted by National Council of Women of Malta, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

The National Council of Women Malta has been carrying out various studies based on the Beijing Platform for Action twelve themes. The studies include an analysis of the local situation in various fields and the sharing of good practice at the European Union level with different stakeholders including representatives of Employers, Trade Unions and a wide range of Non-Governmental Organizations. The proposals are presented first and foremost to the Government. 2015 is an important year for Women and Girls as the Beijing Platform for Action celebrates 20 years offering commitment and actions.

The National Council of Women Malta would like to see a Gender-responsive budget in Malta. This is a government planning, programming and budgeting exercise that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights.

It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets. It also aims to analyse the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources and Official Development Assistance. Gender-responsive budget initiatives seek to create enabling policy frameworks, build capacity and strengthen monitoring mechanisms to support accountability to women.

The Beijing Platform for Action states that all economic policies must be gender-mainstreamed. To promote women's economic independence and rights, we need more female participation in the labour market. Although the government has introduced free childcare in Malta, several fiscal incentives and training opportunities to encourage women to enter the labour market are needed as Malta is still with a female participation rate lower than the European Union average. A comprehensive review of flexibility measures are required in particular in the private sector, to ensure that measures aim at adapting organization of time to an individual's life cycle such as: youth, raising a family and old age can be accommodated. There is also the question of non-transferable parental leave; the evaluation of current and past financial incentives, family-friendly measures and Life Long Learning programmes and skills training for those who wish to join the labour market.

Female Entrepreneurship encounters a number of issues that require addressing. These are: the age at which a female starts a business, a One Stop Shop for female Entrepreneurs, as well as an Act similar to the HR5050 Women Business Ownership Act. It is recommended that entrepreneurship is introduced to young students so as to acquaint themselves with this concept and that a Gender-responsive Investment tool be established.

Addressing the gender gap in Science and Technology. The following needs to be addressed: Changing the Practice of Research Grant Evaluations; Promoting Women Researchers through individual coaching, mentoring training in particular before application, preparation for interview; Addressing barriers to access to PhD levels for women; Ensuring that equality plans are in place and Creating linkages between University and Business to understand better in which areas they can collaborate to promote female researchers.

Addressing undeclared work as informal work deprives workers of their social protection and deprives society of taxes and social security contributions. It also increases the likelihood of poverty. Government should introduce legal solutions, including provisions in the areas of tax, social insurance, labour law and civil law and draw up advice and recommendations for employers while making them commonly available. Raising awareness and promoting information/training on the obligations and rights of employers and workers, especially where schemes exist will encourage these workers to regularize their activities.

Women and Health: Addressing the challenges of demography with public health capacity for gender specific research on how diseases affect women. Invest in new technology with the aim of improving the efficiency of the health workforce, the management of the outbreak and potential of epidemic diseases, and health care in general. We need affordable and quality health care that takes into account the specific needs of women and girls.

Domestic Violence can benefit from an Inter-ministerial Action Plan for the early detection and prevention by creating a bigger pool of professionals working in the field of domestic violence with adequate funding. There should be free specialisation of post graduate studies for professionals working in the field of domestic violence. Adequate programmes for the police force as key actors in reducing and eliminating domestic violence. Prevention and awareness raising programmes of domestic violence through campaigns for youth, the disabled and vulnerable women and girls are also necessary. There are other elements that need monitoring such as forced child marriage, trafficking and female genital mutilation. The procedure of Female Genital Mutilation constitutes a brutal form of gender-based violence against girls and women and a serious violation of fundamental human rights. Midwives practicing in Malta are now being more frequently called upon to assist women who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation. In this developing scenario, the Malta Midwives Association feels it should raise public awareness on the subject. Midwives are encouraged to respect the dignity of the female body and refrain from supporting and participating in any way in genital mutilation practices.

Addressing the needs of migrant women: Every year the number of women migrants is increasing, which makes it necessary, to protect these women, through clear gender-sensitive guidelines. Studies need to be carried out to measure the potential of women migrants contribution to the economy and guarantee suitable employment whilst monitoring migrant women in undeclared work and if necessary offer training in employability skills.

Women are Powerful Agents for Peace and Security and all countries should develop a National Action Plan relative to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 which covers three interrelated themes: participation of women at all levels of decision making in conflict resolutions and peace building; protection of women's and girls' rights and the gender dimension of peace operations.

Women in political decision-making Assemblies and Company Boards are still under represented in Malta. The National Council of Women Malta urges political parties to rethink their strategies and adopt action plans for recruiting an equal number of women and men as candidates for 'winnable seats' and in general, for making party politics more inclusive.

The principle of capitalising on the potential of all individuals (over 50 per cent women) in decision-making should be the foundation for any decisions to be taken in the immediate future and the next step to be taken by political parties is to introduce more concrete measures to ensure a mass of at least 30 per cent participation of women in the House of Representatives to be realistically effective in the decision making process of our political system.

With the new technology and better communication facilities and better training, more women can be recruited in managerial roles which will provide a balanced media output and eliminate stereotype portrayals of women. Women are still under represented in the decision-making structures of media organizations. There is the need to promote more variety of female role models with the true picture of their skills and their contribution to society. Gender Equality for the Media should start from an early age using the education system in schools so that the next generation will have more female voices from across societies heard.

Women need an active role in matters of the Environment and Climate Change contributing in defining needs and finding solutions. They can also be part of the sustainable development scheme raising awareness of environmental health, renewable energy, access to food and water. The general public should be made aware of the need to reduce the consumption of Electricity and heat; Non-electric transport; Non-recycled material. Waste management and packaging including food waste are issues that have a great impact on women and strict legislation should be implemented. The change in climate will impact severely the Mediterranean basin with greater variability and extreme weather events. Climate change is expected to destabilize the hydrological cycle of the Mediterranean in which there is stressful demand on water resources. Extreme weather events such as heat waves and floods pose a direct risk to the health and safety of people, with the very young, the elderly, and the disabled and low-income households particularly vulnerable. Damage to property and infrastructure imposes heavy costs on society and the economy. Sectors that rely strongly on certain temperatures and precipitation levels, such as agriculture, forestry, energy and tourism, will be particularly affected. Women should be actively involved in environmental decision-making at all levels as we need to integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.

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Statement submitted by New Japan Women's Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Since 1962, with its 150,000 members working nationwide, the New Japan Women's Association has been committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, rights of women and children, and global solidarity of women for peace.

For the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, the Association, with other women's groups, presented opinions on the draft Platform for Action, and organized at the Non-Governmental Organization Forum workshops on three themes: "Realities of Working Women", "Japanese Military Comfort Women", and "World without Nuclear Weapons". It has participated in review and follow-up processes of the Being Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action.

2015 is the 70th year of the end of Japan's war of aggression, of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of women's suffrage in Japan. The United Nations will celebrate its 70th anniversary, hold the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and define the Post-2015 Development Agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals.

In order to contribute to advancing women's rights and gender equality in Japan, as well as to achieving a peaceful, just and sustainable world, the Association presents its view on major issues, their causes and solutions.

Shift away from neoliberal economic policies to create a society where both women and men can live humanly

Japan ranks at 105th under the Global Gender Gap Index. A factor keeping Japan in low position in terms of gender equality is the economic disparities between men and women.

Between 1995 and 2013, Japan has seen the increase of women in employment from 20.48 million to 24.06 million; and of the dual-earner households, from 9.08 million to 10.65 million. But 55.8 per cent of working women are in non-regular employment and 60 per cent of female workers exit the workforce after giving birth to their first child still today. Women with full-time jobs earn 70 per cent of what men workers receive, and the pay gap widens to 50 per cent if non-regular workers are included. Women raising children are paid 40 per cent of men, the lowest level among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. Forty-three per cent of female workers are "working poor", who earn 2 million yen or less a year. While 80 per cent of single mothers have jobs, the poverty rate of working single-parent families reaches 54 per cent. Shockingly, the child poverty rate hits the record high of 16.3 per cent, topping the national average of 16.1. Due to the wage disparities and reduced social security, more than 50 per cent of the elderly women live below poverty line. In Japan, a world economic power, poverty is increasing and women are hindered from becoming economically independent.

This situation is attributed to the financial circle's neoliberal strategy backed up by Government policies. They have increased low-paid and unstable non-regular workers with no rights, while adversely revising the social security system to deepen poverty and to widen the gap between rich and poor. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo keeps speaking of "utilizing female power" and a "society where women shine" and his cabinet approved a bill on promoting women's active participation.

However, their aim is to make the best use of women as "resources" for "growth strategy", and the bill lacks concrete measures to redress the pay gap and to eliminate discrimination against women, including through increasing full-time employment and establishing equal treatment of all workers. It is unacceptable that the Government intends to amend the Worker Dispatch Law to lift regulations on the use of temporary agency workers, which will undermine the very basis for working women to be self-reliant.

The Association calls on the Government to implement all the recommendations from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and to display political will to break with the neoliberal strategy and to adopt policies that will guarantee equal opportunities and human rights for all.

Ban and eliminate nuclear weapons and reduce military spending to achieve a peaceful, just and sustainable world

The Government of Japan glorifies the war of aggression and aims to make Japan a war-waging nation. It intends to revise the Constitution, targeting at repealing Article 9, which declares renunciation of war, no possession of war potential and denial of the right to belligerency. It has already enacted the Designated Secrets Protection Law, Japan's exercise of the right to collective self-defense, lifting bans on arms exports, drastically increased military spending, and is forcing through the new military base construction in Okinawa despite the opposition from the majority of the people.

Japanese women are voicing for peace. In all opinion polls women by majority support Article 9, opposing the Designated Secret Protection Laws and the right to collective self-defense.

Calling for the start of negotiations on banning nuclear weapons to be agreed at the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the Association is redoubling its efforts to gather signatures in support of the "Appeal for a Total Ban on Nuclear Weapons," a petition endorsed by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. We aim to collect 2 million signatures to present to the Conference.

Any use of nuclear weapons, whether by accident or by intention, could destroy human beings, communities and nature in an instant. The understanding that nuclear weapons cannot be "deterrence" and their existence itself is a threat to humanity is gaining support, and at the United Nations First Committee in October 2014, a joint statement on humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons signed by 155 countries was presented, calling for banning the use of and eliminating these weapons. The Association believes that the driving force of this development is the movement carried forward by the civil society together with the Hibakusha, Atomic bomb survivors, who have been voicing that nuclear weapons and humans cannot coexist.

The Japanese Government relies on the "nuclear umbrella" of the United States under the security treaty between the two countries, taking a position unbefitting of the atomic bombed country. It is also grave that the Government is pushing the restart and export of nuclear reactors, although it has not been able to effectively deal with the radiation contamination problem caused by the accident at Fukushima power plant.

Enormous money is being spent in developing and producing nuclear weapons. The world's military expenditure in 2013 is estimated to be $1.747 trillion. All this money should be redirected to education, welfare and other human needs, which will help to eradicate causes of conflict such as poverty and hunger. The international community needs the money to tackle climate change as well. The Association underscores that agreement on banning and eliminating nuclear weapons will be a big step forward to change security discourse toward establishing peaceful solution-first security policies.

Resolve the issue of Japanese military "comfort women" to end sexual violence

To settle the issue of Japanese military "comfort women" is to restore dignity of the women who were forced into "sex slaves" and suffered the damage of serious human rights violation and war crimes. It is also proof that Japan squarely faces its war responsibility, committing itself to addressing human rights violation and never to repeat the same mistake. Without doing so, Japan cannot earn trust from the international community.

However, the Government has refused to listen to the survivor's voices or to implement the recommendations from the various human rights bodies. Taking advantage of misinformation published in a major newspaper, Prime Minister, Cabinet members and many other political figures are now trying to deny the legitimacy of the "Kono Statement", in which the Government admitted the Japanese military's involvement, and the Government even requested Radhika Coomaraswamy, former United Nations Deputy Secretary General, to partially revise the 1996 United Nations Commission on Human Rights report on Japan's wartime sexual slavery system, which is totally unacceptable.

As the women's group of the perpetrator country, the Association urges the Government to resolve the issue immediately. We continue efforts to pass the historic facts on to the next generations.

Twenty years have passed since Beijing. Agreements and commitments are in place. The New Japan Women's Association calls on all Member States to implement their commitments for "gender equality, peace and development" and act to realize a peaceful, just and sustainable world.